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Lasthuizen, K.M.; van Eeuwijk, B.; Huberts, L.W.J.C.

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How Policing Can Reduce Feelings of Insecurity: Results from Survey Research in the Netherlands

K. Lasthuizen, B. A. P. van Eeuwijk & L. W. J. C. Huberts

This paper assesses the actions which need to be taken by the police in order to enhance the sense of safety within the community. Based on international literature, a comprehensive model for the link between the actions of the police, crime, and safety is sketched and evaluated using data obtained from the Police Population Monitor, a large-scale national census in the Netherlands. The findings clearly show that the most effective manner to increase the public safety through police actions is to ensure that this takes place from within the direct residential areas of the public, and if the police provide localized made-to-measure services.

Keywords: Policing and Safety; Feelings of Insecurity; Policing and Community

Background

There has been an apparent rapid rise in crime during the last few decades in Western societies. But crime is not a problem which is isolated to individual countries. There are increasing numbers of cross border criminal offenses. With the USA in lead position, nations are assembling their powers to wage the international war against crime—the international offensive against terrorism being the most obvious example. The issue of the increasing notion of vulnerability has also been a problem in the Netherlands. The subject has been high on the public and political agenda, and methods of dealing with crime were the most prominent election campaign item in 2002 and also 2003. The general feeling of uneasiness manifested itself as a national crisis—namely ‘that it’s all getting out of control’ and ‘urgent measures must be taken.’ The public needed to feel safe and made an appeal to the government to guarantee a safe society. The political

Correspondence to: Dr Karin Lasthuizen, Department of Public Administration & Organization Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Buitenveldertselaan 3, 1081 HV Amsterdam, the Netherlands.
Email: K.Lasthuizen@fsw.vu.nl

leaders were of the opinion that the solution lies with more police and more police cells in order to track down, arrest, and lock up more criminals and more readily impose harsher and longer sentences—a common response worldwide (Garland, 2001).

In the Netherlands, a country with approximately 16 million inhabitants, the police force totals about 45,000 officers. In 1994, a major institutional reform took place, re-organizing the Dutch police into 25 regional forces and one central force. Nevertheless, in comparison to the USA for example, the Dutch police are still extremely centralized. Decisions and rulings relating to recruitment, training, salaries, uniforms, and a large share of the equipment are made on a national basis. Even though the administration is regionally executed, the two central ministries, Internal Affairs and Justice retain crucial management control of the police organization.

Strong central involvement was also evident in the Cabinet's new safety plan, 'Towards a Safer Society,' from November 2002 (Tweede Kamer, 2002). In each of the 25 regions the police have to answer to the central government with respect to their efforts to increase the level of safety in the Netherlands. The Internal Affairs Minister (Minister van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2001, p. 1) executes this by means of performance-related finances. The performance-related finances implemented by the minister entails that a regional force will be allocated extra finances providing that a number of the force's so-called performance indicators have improved measurably after a period of one year (Korpsbeheerdersberaad, 2001; Werkgroep Prestatiebeloning, 2001). The emphasis lies on the output indicators—concrete figures relating to the police tracking down criminals. The indicators form the basis for performance contracts between the minister and the police. The implicit underlying reasoning is that the increase in apprehensions by police will cause a reduction in the number of registered criminal offenses and that a reduction in crime will result in an enhancement of the sense of safety and security in the community.

There was a question about whether or not the social and political panic, which resulted in the minister's new police policy, developed at the same rate as the true crime development rate. This is not the case, as the findings of the Police Population Monitor show that, across the Netherlands, crime decreased during the last few years. Feelings of insecurity did not increase either. It has in fact remained almost level: approximately 25–30% of the Dutch public state they feel (sometimes) insecure (Uitvoeringsconsortium Projectbureau Politiemonitor, 2001a). Furthermore, the public is invariably of the opinion that crime is one of the most significant social issues (de Hart, 2002, p. 245).

The picture that arises illustrates that reducing the feelings of insecurity experienced by the public is not as straightforward as it seems. The tough approach to crime does not appear to have had a direct impact on the public's feelings, which have remained unchanged throughout the years, while at the same time the concerns about crime, as a social problem, only appear to be on the up. With respect to the question, what action should the police undertake in order to reduce the feelings of insecurity of the public?—it is important to firstly define what this means and to look at it in a wider scientific perspective.

Concepts and Theory

With the public and politicians turning to police, this paper assesses the actions which need to be taken by the police in order to enhance the sense of safety within the community. The basic assumption is the link between actions taken by the police to counteract crime and the assumption that the public will feel safer as a consequence, as shown in Figure 1.

We have established that this is not a causal relationship. Based on international literature, we have drawn up a more comprehensive model for the link between the actions of the police, crime, and safety. This model will be evaluated using data obtained from the Police Population Monitor, a large-scale bi-annual national census in the Netherlands, executed on behalf of the Ministries of Internal Affairs and the Justice Department and a significant number of police forces, into crime, insecurity, preventative behavior by the public, and the quality of the actions of the police.

We deployed van der Vijver's (1993, p. 95) theory for the definition of feelings of insecurity, so that we will be able to apply this concept by making a distinction between feelings of fear and feelings of unrest. Feelings of fear are related to a subjectively experienced situation of danger and unease which is related to the anticipated risk of becoming a victim. Unease exists when the feelings are related to the uneasiness concerning the development of crime as a social problem. Feeling insecure is a non-differentiated concept, which can entail both fear and unrest. The immediate environment of the public is of importance with respect to feelings of fear. This relates to feeling insecure and crime as it is experienced in their own neighborhood and surroundings. Contrary to this, feelings of unrest are fuelled by the news provided by the media. This then relates to the uneasiness which is created by information about crime and danger outside people's own personal environment in the Netherlands and across the globe. Feelings of insecurity are also denoted as subjective safety. We defined crime as 'committed crimes.' Not all crimes committed are reported to the police. The non-reported crimes form the so-called 'dark number' in police statistics. The data relating to victims from population research (census) are used to gain an impression of these figures. Crime was also denoted as objective safety. The actions undertaken or neglected by the police to influence the sense of safety are summed up with the term 'acting.' If the police assume the role of an institution that tracks down criminals then the apprehension output is the quantifiable effect of their actions. Police apprehension output relates to the quantifiable representation of the criminal law enforcement actions of the police. Within the scope of this paper reference is made only to the actions of the police against crime in terms of the law. In general, quantifiable representations are expressed using indicators, such as the number of suspects arrested in one year, the number of police reports drawn up, and the percentage of solved incidents—in other words, the number of solved crimes divided by the total number of

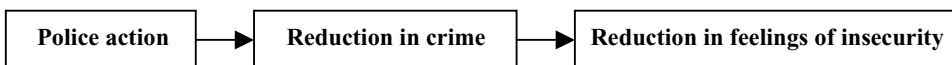


Figure 1 Basic Assumption.

reported crimes. The actions of the police encompass more than only the police apprehension figures. This point is covered more extensively in the following: international scientific literature states numerous theories relating to the origins and prevention of crime and the relationship between crime and feelings of insecurity. These theories clearly illustrate that fine distinction is required regarding the supposition of the simple causal relationship between crime and feelings of insecurity which is implicitly applied in debates and policies.

Feelings of Insecurity: Fear of Crime

The fact that there is no direct relationship between victimization and fear was ascertained as early as 1967 when the initial research project into fear of crime was carried out by Reiss and Biderman (in Lewis, 1996, pp. 97–106). Victim research analysts, such as Skogan (1976), established that fear of crime often occurs with groups who are in fact least likely to become victims. According to van der Vijver (1993, pp. 99–100), feelings of fear primarily exist in relation to crimes with an estimated low victim probability rate and for which the public are also aware that they can become a victim of such a crime at any given moment and that the victim is then wholly at the mercy of the assailant. This is mainly experienced with respect to violent crimes and property crimes with a specific threat, such as housebreaking.

In general, victim accounts have only a limited bearing on feelings of fear. For example, although young males in large cities experience the lowest levels of feelings of fear, they are most likely to become victims. Their conduct and actions, such as going out, acting tough, and risk seeking, are linked to the likelihood of becoming a victim. Older people and women experience a greater extent of feelings of fear, however relatively speaking they are less likely to become a victim of crime as their conduct ensures that they find themselves in less risky situations. This apparent contradiction is also known as the ‘fear–victimization paradox’ (Vanderveen, 1999, 2000). Van de Vijver attempts to find an explanation for this phenomenon in what he calls the ‘manageability assessment.’ He makes a comparison to conduct in traffic. Everyone has learned to travel in traffic and if everyone sticks to the rules, at the very most an ‘accident’ can happen. If this is the case, then in most situations this is the result of personal conduct. The feeling of relative control of potential danger is present. This feeling is absent with respect to many types of crime.

Van der Vijver (1993, p. 97) also points out the significance of the neighborhood in this context. The level of perceived feelings of insecurity is strongly linked to people’s opinion of their neighborhood. People who live in a ‘bad’ neighborhood, in which problems such as litter, noise pollution, crime (theft, graffiti), or other problems (collisions, harassment) occur on a regular basis, feel less safe than people who live in a ‘good’ neighborhood. This phenomenon is so strong that even people with multiple victimization traumas who live in a ‘good’ neighborhood often feel safer than people with no personal crime victimization experience who live in a ‘bad’ neighborhood (Stuurgroep Politie, 2000, pp. 48 and 50). Van der Vijver (1993, p. 101) also attempts to explain this with manageability assessment. In so-called ‘run-down’

neighborhoods, or where there is a threatening presence of youths or strangers, the risk of becoming a victim seems to be greater and the predictable character of the neighborhood declines. This in turn reduces the feeling of manageability and the sense of fear increases accordingly.

Feeling Insecure: Unrest about Crime

According to van der Vijver (1993, p. 102), in contrast to feeling insecure, crime-related unrest is associated with a more abstract notion of crime, it is associated with the *threat to 'the' society by 'the' crime*. These feelings of insecurity are unrelated to the perceived probability of becoming a victim and also unrelated to personal victim experience. They have a high standard-setting level. It is not simple to discover the influential factors for perceived feelings of unrest. This is not actually related to fear, but the unrest created by the establishment of a certain image. The media play a significant role in this. The question, which has to be raised, is who in fact runs this country? Is the government in charge of this country, can they vouch for a just society or is the whole business being dictated by the criminals?

The issue is therefore not the fear of becoming a victim, but more so the faith in the government having full control. Arrests by the police can play a role in this. The police and the justice department can also use the media to present their arrest figures with respect to serious organized crime. However, there are two sides to this; on the one hand the impression may be created that the government is 'dealing with' the enemy, and on the other hand if this takes place on a regular basis it may also create the impression that our society is overrun with criminal gangs. Attempting to find a balanced arrest policy, combined with a balanced media policy, seems to be a requirement for this issue.

The perception that people are in control of their surroundings plays a significant role for both feelings of fear and feelings of unrest. Van der Vijver (1993, p. 128) states that 'people have a fundamental requirement to be in a position to exert control over their own environment.' People need a predictable and controllable environment. Order, predictability, and controllability play key roles in the perception of personal safety. Van der Vijver (1993, p. 142) attempts to explain this using Lerner's social-psychological insights derived from his 'Just World theory.' People have the need to believe that they are living in a just world. Therefore, people will seek to re-define the situation in such a way that their perception of the world becomes just again. People achieve their safety by, mostly on a sub-conscious level, creating a psychological world perception in which both perpetrators and victims are expelled to another dimension. The perpetrators have to be 'defused.' They are the 'crooks' and have to pay the price for the privileges that they have appropriated at the expense of others. Victims can also be de-valued in this process. They must have deserved it in one way or another. These notions support the perception that the individual is a good citizen who cannot become a victim.

To deal with the threat to society by the criminals, we need the government, police, and justice system in order to achieve controllability again. In our own area this plays a much less significant role (van der Vijver, 1993, p. 135). After all, in our own areas we are aware of the problems and we know who is responsible.

Implications for the Actions of the Police

In relation to police actions this means that a distinction must be made between problems in the public's own neighborhood, those in close proximity, and problems far removed (van der Vijver, 1993, pp. 154–156). In their own neighborhood people expect that the police, who are familiar with the neighborhood, will choose the side of law-abiding residents and act in accordance with the spirit of the neighborhood. The police have to show that they act to resolve issues quickly and adequately. Criminal justice measures do not necessarily have to be applied, it can also be resolved in a low-key manner. In the citizen's own neighborhood the implication of arrests is primarily a means to resolve an issue. However, the issues outside the neighborhood are different altogether. These issues tend to be defined in terms of enemy perceptions. The residents are not as familiar with the problem, however they do experience it as being threatening and more serious than the problems in their own neighborhood.

Lerner's Just World Theory adds an additional dimension to the role the public wishes the police to assume. If someone has become the victim of a crime which incites outrage, the perception of the just world has been violated and that perception must be reinstated. But it is more to do with the battle against unjustness that has been experienced than arresting the perpetrator. This is why the victims and the public want to know that the police and the justice department are doing their very best to solve the case. If the police and the justice department do not conduct their services in this way then you live in an insecure world (Van Eeuwijk, 2002, pp. 13–34; van der Vijver, 1993, p. 148). This is a concept which does not only have an impact on the treatment of victims, but also on the execution of a balanced apprehension and media policy. This approach resonates with the ecological theory of social disorganization of the 'Chicago School,' and with Hirshi's 'Social Bond' Theory. The conceptual model that arises from this review is shown in Figure 2. In the model, all the sections of the theory are joined into one model that can be evaluated. This relates to clusters of specifics of actual crime, the actions of the police, the neighborhood, and feelings of insecurity.

Method

In order to evaluate the theoretical model, one Dutch police region, namely Zeeland was selected. Using SPSS and other techniques, multi-variate regression analyses were carried out for Zeeland as a whole, with the focus on two cities in particular, Middelburg and Vlissingen. Zeeland is a rural region situated in the southeast of the Netherlands and has a population of 371,866. The municipalities of Middelburg and Vlissingen have populations of 44,920 and 44,342, respectively. Data were used from the Police Population Monitor from 1999 and 2001 and from the Zeeland regional police force output data for the years in question. In addition to the quantitative research four interviews were held with key figures in the specifically selected areas in Zeeland. The grounds for choosing the Zeeland region were that the police monitor showed great improvements in feelings of insecurity (Uitvoeringsconsortium Projectbureau Politie-monitor, 2001b, p. 94).

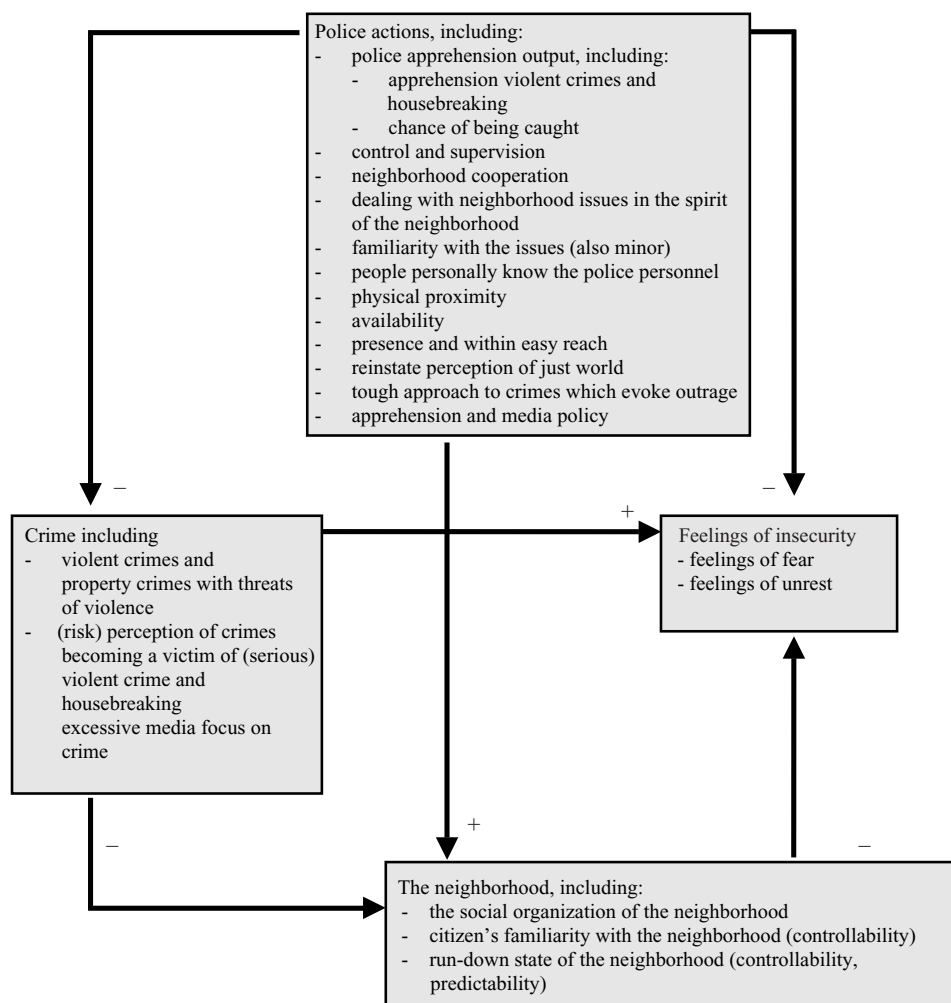


Figure 2 Theoretical Model.

The Police Population Monitor is a large-scale two yearly population census into crime, feelings of insecurity, preventative conduct of the public, and the quality of the actions of the police. It is the largest survey about feelings of insecurity, crime, and police actions in Europe. The research was carried out under the instruction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Justice Department and a number of large police forces (Uitvoeringsconsortium Projectbureau Politie-monitor, 2001a, p. 11). A minimum of 1,000 respondents were surveyed per police force region. The total data-set comprises approximately 400,000 respondents. The Monitor provides a significant amount of data, which through time can be used to make comparisons. The first police monitor survey was carried out in 1993, the most recent in 2001, and therefore five national surveys have already taken place. The last two surveys from 1999 and 2001 were used for this paper. In Zeeland the total number of respondents was approximately 5,250.

With respect to feelings of insecurity, the Monitor posed the question whether or not people feel insecure on occasion. When the answer was positive more details were requested. The respondents were to choose between 'often,' 'sometimes,' 'seldom,' and 'don't know/don't wish to answer.' The question, 'Do you sometimes feel insecure?,' signifies an individual personal feeling. No questions relating to the more general concern or unrest about crime in our society were incorporated in the survey. However, questions were posed relating to the opinions of the respondents with respect to the regular occurrence of neighborhood problems, such as run-down state, house-breaking, and other crime. There were also questions asked about actual cases of being a victim of crime and the assessment of the actions of the police.

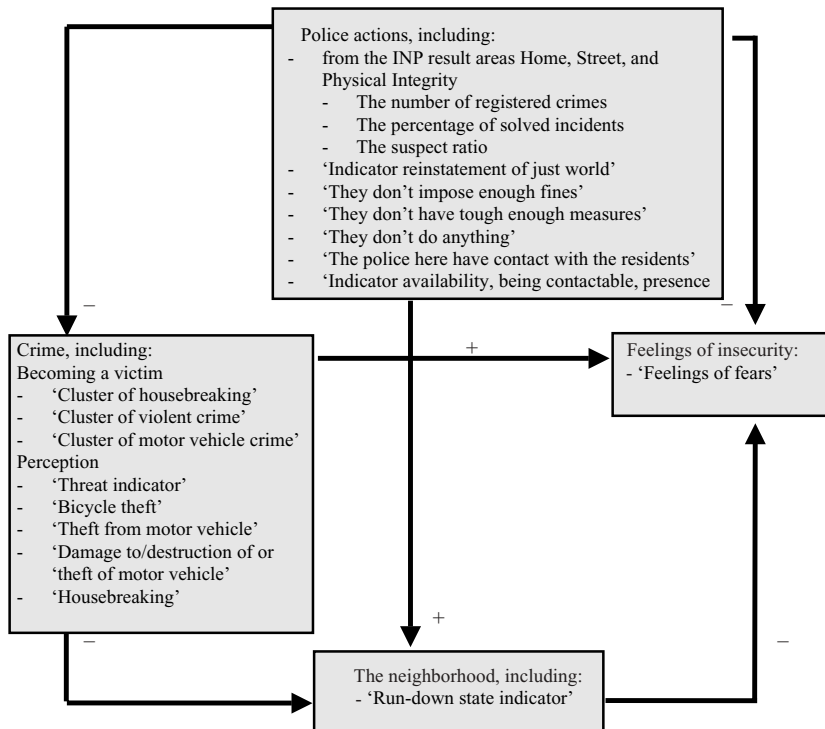
In addition to the data from the Police Population Monitor, data were also used from the Zeeland police files. The Dutch Police Information Model uses two different indicators which provide information about the apprehension performance of the police (Stuurgroep Informatiemodel Nederlandse Politie, 2001, p. 12). The first one relates to the suspect ratio. The suspect ratio provides the number of suspects for whom a police report was sent to the Department of Justice per 100 crimes. In addition to this there is the solved incidents percentage. The solved incidents percentage is the number of solved crimes divided by the total number of registered crimes. Finally the rise or the decrease of the total number of registered crimes is also significant. The Zeeland police force can generate these data using the GIDS system from the computerized business processes system (BPS). The method used for the police results is linked to the nationally applied classifications, in accordance with the INP: the Dutch Police Information Model (Stuurgroep Informatiemodel Nederlandse Politie, 2001, p. 3). The applied model used is shown in Figure 3.

Findings

In 1999, 23.8% of the citizens of Zeeland felt insecure on occasion. In 2001 this percentage decreased significantly to 19.4%. The quantitative research and the additional interviews showed that multiple variables had a significant influence relating to the public's feelings of insecurity. In this section the main findings are reported and interpreted (for a detailed report on the statistical analysis, see Van Eeuwijk, 2002, accessible at www.fsw.vu.nl/integriteit). The results are at the end of the section summarized in a model (Figure 4).

Actions of the Police

The questionnaire incorporated variables concerning how the actions of the police influence the feelings of insecurity of the public. Those were the variables incorporated in the 'Reinstate perception of a just world' indicator (comprising the items 'The police provide protection,' 'The police react to problems in the neighborhood,' 'The police are doing their best,' and 'The police deal with cases efficiently') and the variables 'They are not harsh enough,' 'They don't impose enough fines,' and 'They don't do anything.' In Middelburg in 2001 these questions related to threats of violence which could be directly



Comments:

- All variables in inverted commas are variables from the Police Population Monitor. The remaining variables are derived from police files.
- The indicators which relate to *actions of the police* were classified as follows: Reinstatement of perception of just world: perception of 'the police provide protection,' 'the police react to problems in the neighborhood,' 'the police do their best,' and 'the police dealt with matters efficiently.' Availability, contactable, and presence indicator: perception of 'you don't see the police often enough in the neighborhood,' 'they don't get out of their vehicle enough,' 'they are not approachable enough here,' 'they don't have enough time to deal with all sorts of matters,' and 'they don't come quickly when you call them.' The run-down state indicator as part of the *neighborhood* classification is classified as follows: perception of 'litter on the streets,' 'dog dirt on the streets,' 'destruction of phone boxes, bus halts, or tram halts,' 'other forms of noise pollution,' 'graffiti on walls and/or buildings,' 'nuisance caused by groups of youths,' 'nuisance caused by neighbors.' The Threat Indicator as part of *crime* is classified as follows: perception of 'threat,' 'drunken people in public places,' 'men and women being bothered in the street,' 'violent crimes,' and 'drugs-related problems.'
- The model is not all embracing. The sub-factors, which, for one reason or another could not be quantitatively approached are, 'chance of being caught,' 'apprehension and media policy,' 'excessive media focus on crime,' and 'citizen's familiarity with the neighborhood.' These aspects were dealt with during the interviews.

Figure 3 Applied Model.

traced to serious violent crimes in the center of Middelburg in the entertainment areas, of which extensive television coverage was transmitted by the regional television channels. In 2001 in Vlissingen the issue was the recently established group of Antilleans in the 'Middengebied' neighborhood in 1999. The problem could be traced back to the large number of housebreaking crime carried out by a small group of prolific housebreakers. In addition to this, the analysis shows that the apprehension output, converted into performance indicators, did not provide any indication whatsoever concerning the success or failure of the police (Van Eeuwijk, 2002, pp. 66–69, 83–85, and 94–95).

The quantitative research did show that a negative public opinion concerning the actions of the police in the neighborhood had a significant impact on feelings of insecurity. The additional interviews also showed that the lack of police actions relating to well-known non-safe neighborhood issues in 1999 was in fact a significant factor for the feelings of insecurity. In the regression analysis this factor accounted for two-thirds of the explained variance of the feelings of insecurity in Middelburg. There was a great improvement in 2001 with respect to the appreciation for the actions of the police in Middelburg, but the actions of the police were no longer a significant factor for the improvement of feelings of insecurity. The conclusion can therefore be made that these police actions are so-called 'dissatisfiers.' If the police do what they are expected to do, this is considered normal, and not a good ground for the public to feel safer. If they don't do this then that is a ground for the public to feel more insecure. This also explains the significant effect of the variable 're-instatement of a just world' on feelings of insecurity in the regression analysis carried out for Vlissingen in 1999. In the regression analysis this factor accounted for one-third of the explained variance of the feelings of insecurity in Vlissingen. The perception and experience of being a victim of housebreaking accounted for the other two-thirds of the explained variance. The inadequate actions of the police against housebreaking crimes in their own area were therefore additional grounds for the public to feel insecure. In 2001 the variable 're-instatement of just world' was not registered as a significant variable for feelings of insecurity in Vlissingen either. The discovery that the variable 'they are not harsh enough' was however a significant influential factor for the feelings of insecurity in Vlissingen in 2001—in the regression analysis this factor accounted for one-third of the explained variance of the feelings of insecurity in Vlissingen—leads to the conclusion that the actions of the police must be perceived in relation to the occurrences which trigger feelings of insecurity and the expectations of the public that the police actions are geared towards these occurrences. After all, the findings are at odds with the dissatisfier reasoning. As the police became harsher this should, if the dissatisfier reasoning is correct, lead to the public finding themselves in a 'normal' situation.

The dissatisfier reasoning should therefore be augmented in order to provide an explanation for the last occurrence. The theory used in this paper was used for this purpose. Van der Vijver states that people, as a defensive mechanism against crime, create enemy images. In this perception, the criminal has the appearance of a typical 'con,' who does not actually cause trouble in our daily lives and does not affect us on an individual level. It is however a potential danger for our society as a whole and we are not capable of solving the collective threat ourselves. This creates a major sense of

un-controllability, distrust, and fear. We need the government, police, and justice system in order to obtain controllability. They have to 'deal with' the evil. Van der Vijver (1993, p. 135) also stated that the perception of the enemy for the problems in our own area assumes a much less significant role. After all, in our own areas we are familiar with the problems and the people who are behind them. If this theory were applied to the results of the regression analyses carried out in Middelburg and Vlissingen then the dissatisfier reasoning can be easily supplemented.

In Vlissingen there is one group, 'the Antilleans,' who without a doubt fitted in with van der Vijver's enemy image. This has been an issue since 2000, especially in the 'Middengebied.' If this is a place where 'decent' citizens do not go, then no one is troubled by the problem. You read and hear all about it and there is only one conclusion: tough approach to the enemy! There is another mechanism in Middelburg. The main predicting indicator used for feelings of insecurity in both years was the 'run-down state' indicator. This relates to the quality of the neighborhood. As long as the police deal with the neighborhood issues 'in the spirit of the neighborhood' then under normal circumstances is no reason to feel safer. However, if, in the opinion of the public, the police fail to do their duty then this is a reason to feel more insecure.

The perception of 'threats of violence' was a significant variable for feelings of insecurity in Middelburg for the first time in 2001. The conclusion can be made, based on the interviews, that this was primarily due to the extensive media coverage of large-scale and serious violent crimes in the center of Middelburg. This is related to the tangible fear of being confronted with violence within your own area. After all, everyone goes into town on occasion. In this case, just as in your own neighborhood, it boils down to relying on the police. If this is the case, then you can rest easy that you do live in a just world. If this is not the case, then it is an additional reason to feel insecure.

There are in fact two criteria. Firstly whether or not the phenomenon is taking place in the citizen's own neighborhood or not. Secondly, if it is occurring outside the citizen's own neighborhood, whether or not it is defined as a potential danger to society, as a collective threat, caused by the 'evil.' The conclusions, derived from the literature review, from these quantitative data and supplementary interview findings, are as follows. The public expects the police to deal with occurrences of crime and a run-down state, which are influential factors for their feelings of insecurity. Does this relate to occurrences in the citizens' own neighborhood? If so, there is personal confrontation. Then the public expect the police to provide protection, react to the problems, do their best, and deal with the situation effectively ('in the spirit of the neighborhood'). Does it relate to occurrences outside their own neighborhood? If so, there is no personal confrontation, and these are occurrences with the impact of a potential danger and a collective threat for the community, then the opinion becomes more black and white and the public demand that the police assume a tough approach against the criminals who are perpetrating these crimes.

In the first case, the actions of the police are a dissatisfier. If the police do what the public expects, then under normal circumstances this is no reason to feel safer. However, if they fail to live up to the expectations (provide protection, react to problems, do their best, and deal with issues in the spirit of the neighborhood) then this is a reason to feel

more insecure. The notion that you cannot rely on the police when you need them is created. In the second case, the actions of the police are a satisfier. The more the police live up to expectations (harsher approach), the more the actions of the police will reduce the feelings of insecurity. The extent to which the police do not live up to expectations, the more the (lack of) police actions will increase the feelings of insecurity.

Crime

Many assumptions from the literature review into the influence of crime were confirmed by the findings. Perceptions of violent crimes and crimes of property with threats, such as housebreaking, had a significant influence on feelings of insecurity. In Zeeland the only property crime in question was housebreaking. The other crimes of property did not have a significant influence. Being a victim of violent crime, breaking and entering, and motor vehicle crime, were of the most significance, in conformance with the model. Van der Vijver stated that being a victim of less serious crimes would not have an impact on feelings of insecurity. This may be due to differential factors in the research areas. Van der Vijver carried out his research in large cities. Mirrlees-Black's (1998, p. 1) assumption that in more rural areas the inhabitants have more conservative values was proved by this research. Being a victim of the remaining crimes, excluding collisions, had an apparently significant influence on feelings of insecurity. The crimes in question here were pickpocketing, theft from changing rooms, destruction of garden plants, and such like. Furthermore, the media focus on crime was also proven to be a significant factor. The TV images of broadcasting station Zeeland of a large-scale and serious violent crime set the scene for the summer and caused the perception of 'threat' to become a significant influence for the feelings of insecurity of the public. The combination of the seriousness of the incident and the excessive media attention appears to be a powerful influential factor for the feelings of insecurity.

The Neighborhood

The run-down state of the neighborhood was applied as a variable and incorporated in the quantitative research. The focus on Vlissingen and Middelburg can be taken as further specification of 'the neighborhood.' The results of the investigation showed that it made a significant difference whether the insecurity in Vlissingen or Middelburg is examined. Causes of non-safety and feelings of insecurity are often founded in the neighborhood and can be highly specific for each neighborhood. It was also shown that the causes change through time. There were other issues in 2001 than in 1999. At any rate, the social quality of neighborhoods is an important action point for safety policy.

The interviews also highlighted indications that support the various theories. The new and more neighborhood-oriented manner of operation of the police in Zeeland, such as organizing meetings in the neighborhood, are examples of working together with the neighborhood. This is what several authors pointed out with various objectives, such as increasing the social self-reliance, the social cohesion, social quality, and social organization of the neighborhood.

Police interventions can contribute to an improvement of the social organization of the neighborhood. If the people did not already know each other then this was an opportunity to do so as they were closing ranks concerning a safety issue, whereby the police assumed the function of a catalyst. Working together leads to self-reliance. The police working together with the neighborhood can truly contribute to the improvement of the social organization of the neighborhood and with that also contribute to the reduction of the feelings of insecurity of the public. The assessed model is shown in Figure 4.

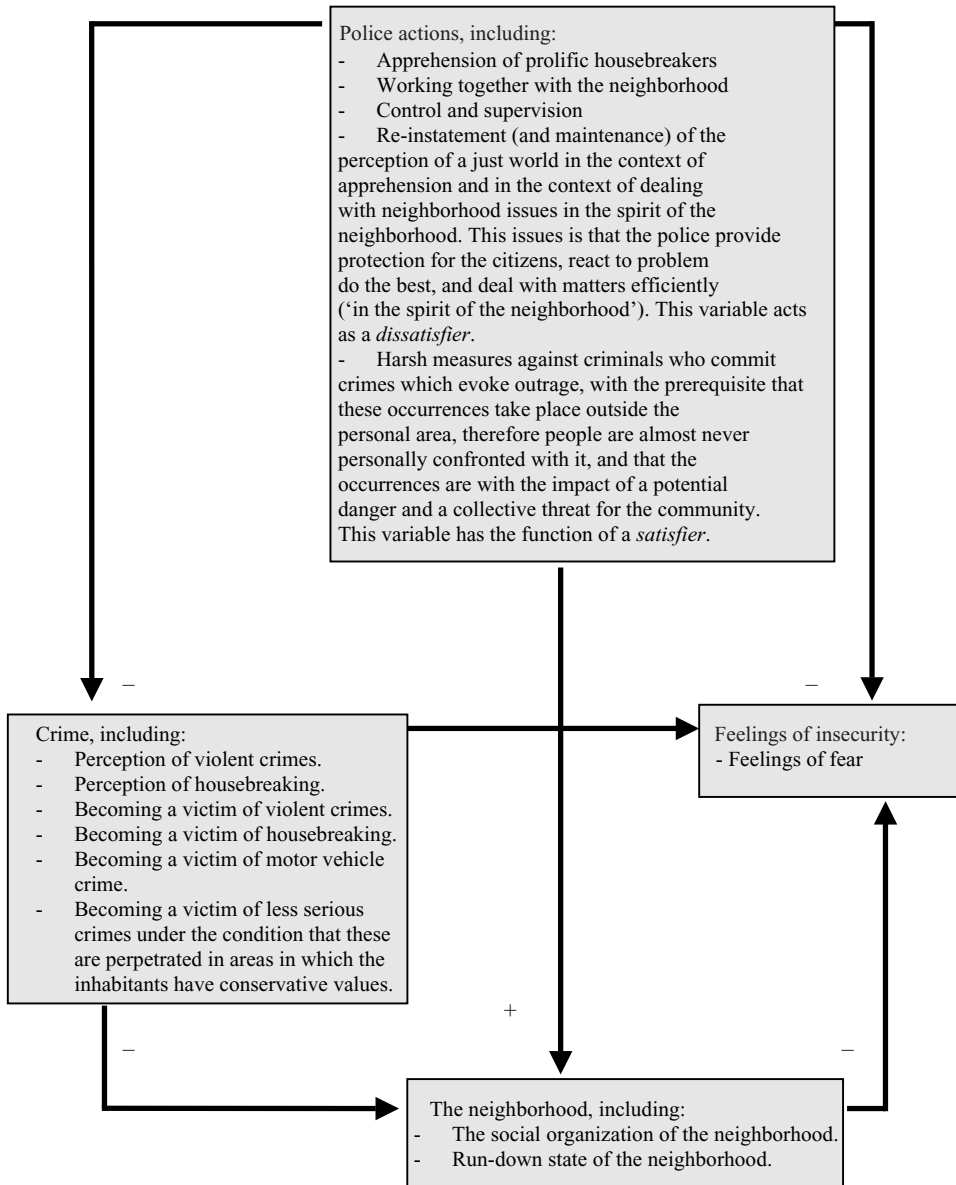


Figure 4 The Assessed Model.

Discussion and Conclusions

The question posed at the start of this paper was ‘What actions of the police contribute to a reduction in the feelings of insecurity of the public?’ Our research primarily indicated that the actions of the police do contribute to a reduction in the feelings of insecurity of the public. The public expects that the police will deal with occurrences that increase the feelings of insecurity, such as the run-down state of neighborhoods and crime. It is also possible that (non-)actions of the police contribute to an increase in the feelings of insecurity of the public. The question as to *how* the police must act in order to reduce the feelings of insecurity of the public is to be split into two categories. In the first situation the occurrences take place within the *personal residence area*, allowing the public to be personally confronted with it. In this case the public expects the police to provide protection, react to the problems, do their best, and deal with matters efficiently (‘in the spirit of the neighborhood’). The action of the police is a dissatisfier. If they do what the public expects, then in normal circumstances this is no reason to feel any safer. However, if they do not live up to expectations, then this is a reason to feel less safe. This creates the perception that you cannot rely on the police when you need them. In the second situation the occurrences take place outside the *personal residence area*, therefore the public are almost never personally confronted with the problem. Such occurrences are considered as a potential danger and a collective threat for the community and they evoke feelings of unrest among the public. In this case, the public demand that the police undertake harsh measures against the criminals who cause these occurrences. The action of the police is a satisfier. The more the police live up to the expectations (tough approach), the more the actions of the police will reduce the feelings of insecurity. The more the police fail to live up to the expectations, the more the (non-)performance of the police will contribute to the increase of the feelings of insecurity.

Our research showed the significance of the neighborhood as a source of safety and non-safety, regardless of whether this relates to the origins or occurrence of crime or the feelings of insecurity of the public. The social organization of the neighborhood is significant as it can be considered the source of (non-)safety. The neighborhood is the place where it all starts for the public, but also for the police. The social quality of the neighborhood is an important action point for the safety policy. Through police and neighborhood cooperation—such as motivating residents and holding meetings—the police make a contribution to the social quality of the neighborhood and to the reduction of the feelings of insecurity of the public.

More information was also obtained relating to the *role of the media*, even though this factor was not incorporated in the evaluated (quantitative) model. It was discovered that one single incidence of violence, which receives extensive media coverage, can be enough to influence the feelings of insecurity of the public. The source of the media focus is apparently therefore significant. Also the adoption of the police’s media policy in the research holds prospects. The Zeeland chiefs of police opted for image management in order to consciously build up a good relationship with the press and to create ‘positive press moments.’ This is considered to be a perspective-rich strategy to improve the level of appreciation for the police and also to reduce the feelings of insecurity of the public.

Consequences for Policy

The research indicated that a tough approach to crime alone does not automatically result in an increase in the feelings of safety of the public. This raises issues with the arguments of national and international political leaders for 'more police, more cells and more punishment.' A wider perspective is required in order to create and maintain a safe, manageable, and predictable society, which begins in the residential areas of the public. The findings are therefore at odds with the Netherlands' Safety Plan and the idea that police should use apprehension figures as performance indicators to assess the safety policy, based on the 'paradigm of businesslike leadership' (Minister van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2001). The police consider this to be a company that supplies products. Those products are defined. There is a specific input, the business has a specific throughput, which results in a measurable output. This output has an impact on the surroundings, which in turn results in a specific outcome. More safety is the desired outcome. The assumption is made that an improvement in the output, measured using performance indicators, will give rise to the desired outcome. Our research shows that the reasoning becomes invalid here. The most significant reason for this is that the specific regional and local situation is not taken into consideration. Reduction and increase of feelings of insecurity are not outcomes of a specific product. Feelings of insecurity are a complex social phenomenon.

The causes are, as shown in our research, extremely diverse and in the Netherlands they vary in each municipality and even in each neighborhood, but also through time. If the police have to be given guidance with respect to making the Netherlands safer then they will have to deal with the causes. This requires a differentiated approach which is tailor-made for the local situation. This is another paradigm, in which the analysis of a reaction to the causes of feelings of insecurity is a key issue, or in other words, 'a *paradigm of causal leadership*.'

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